

Colorectal Cancer Screening

What is a cancer screening test?

A screening test is looking for cancer before a person has any symptoms. This can help find cancer at an early stage. If a screening test result is abnormal, you may need to have more tests—called diagnostic tests—done to find out if you have cancer. Studies show that a screening test for colorectal cancer helps decrease the number of deaths from the disease by identifying cancer at an early stage. Experts look for screening tests with the fewest risks and most benefits. The screening tests for colorectal cancer include:

STOOL TESTS:

- **Fecal Occult Blood Tests (FOBT):** uses a chemical called guaiac to detect blood in the stool. Blood may indicate cancer but can also be found for many other reasons. This test is done once a year. You need to use a special test kit.
- **Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT):** Uses antibodies to find blood in the stool. It is also done once a year and needs a special test kit.
- **FIT-DNA:** Combines a FIT with a test that finds altered DNA in the stool. Need to collect an entire bowel movement and send it to a lab to be checked for cancer cells. This test is done every one to three years.

FLEXIBLE SIGMOIDOSCOPY:

The doctor puts a short, thin, flexible, lighted tube into your rectum. The test will check for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and the lower third of the colon. It is done every 5 to 10 years along with a FIT done every year.

COLONOSCOPY:

The doctor uses a longer, thin, flexible, lighted tube to check for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and the entire colon. During the test, most polyps and some cancers can be removed. The colonoscopy is used if anything unusual is found in other screening tests. This is done every 10 years.

VIRTUAL COLONOSCOPY:

Also called a CT colonoscopy, it uses X-ray and computers to produce images of the entire colon. This is done every 5 years.

What screening test is right for me?

There is no single “best test” for every person. Each test has advantages and disadvantages. Talk to your doctor about the “pros” and “cons” of each test and how often you would need to be tested. If you don’t have a doctor you see on a regular basis, talk to a family member, friend or co-worker and ask for a name of a doctor who can help you understand the process.

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When should colorectal cancer screening be done?

The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force and others recommend adults age 50 to 75 be screened for colorectal cancer. The decision to be screened after age 75 should be made on an individual basis. People at “higher risk” of developing colorectal cancer should begin screening at a younger age and may need to be tested more often based on their doctor’s recommendation.

This sheet was developed using information from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). For more information, you can go to:

- www.cancer.gov
- www.cdc.gov